On the Nature and Importance of Cultural Tightness–Looseness

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Cross-cultural research is dominated by the use of values despite their mixed empirical support and their limited theoretical scope. This article expands the dominant paradigm in cross-cultural research by developing a theory of cultural tightness–looseness (the strength of social norms and the degree of sanctioning within societies) and by advancing a multilevel research agenda for future research. Through an exploration of the top-down, bottom-up, and moderating impact that cultural tightness–looseness has on individuals and organizations, as well as on variance at multiple levels of analysis, the theory provides a new and complementary perspective to the values approach.

Keywords: culture, norms, tightness–looseness, multilevel theorizing, organizations

Once a field that was largely culture blind and culture bound (Triandis, 1994), today virtually no area of organizational psychology has been left unaffected by the quest to understand cross-cultural differences—from microlevel processes, such as work motivation (Erez & Earley, 1987), to mesolevel processes, such as conflict and negotiation (Gelfand & Brett, 2004), group dynamics (Earley, 1993), and leadership (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), to macrolevel processes, such as human resource practices and organizational culture (Aycan, Kanungo, & Sinha, 1999; Kanungo & Jaeger, 1990). The importance of cross-cultural research cannot be underestimated; cross-cultural research is critical to making the science of psychology universally applicable and to helping organizations manage cultural differences as they continue to globalize.

Although a cross-cultural lens has been applied to diverse phenomena, as is the case in many scientific fields, there exists a single underlying dominant paradigm in cross-cultural organizational research. Most, if not all, research has relied on values (cross-situational principles that guide one's life; Schwartz, 1994) to explain cultural differences. To be sure, the use of values to explain cultural differences has intuitive appeal. Values are broad constructs that psychologists have been examining for decades, and thus their use has enabled researchers to understand the complexity of culture in familiar psychological territory (Bond,

1997). Values also easily lend themselves to measurement at the individual level, where much of the research on culture resides (Morris, Podolny, & Ariel, 2000). The use of values to understand cultural differences is also a welcome shift in a field that was once largely atheoretical and used geography as a proxy for culture (Gelfand & Dyer, 2000). In all, values have provided much promise to the study of cultural differences.

Yet, despite the intuitive appeal of values, there has been growing skepticism that values can fully explain cultural differences in behavior. First, the sole reliance on values for understanding culture has been questioned on empirical grounds. While some studies illustrate that values are useful explanatory concepts (Morris et al., 1998; P. B. Smith & Schwartz, 1997), still others show that values do not always have explanatory power in understanding cultural differences (e.g., Ip & Bond, 1995; Leung, Bond, & Schwartz, 1995; Tinsley, 1998). Even when the values construct is broadened to include other person variables, such as attitudes and beliefs, they are still mixed in their ability to explain cross-cultural differences in behavior (see Bond, 1997, for a review). As Bond, Leung, Au, Tong, and Chemonges-Nielson (2004) noted, "This approach is firmly entrenched, despite the mixed empirical success of values at unpackaging cultural differences in individual responses" (p. 178).

The sole reliance on values to understand cultural differences has also been questioned on theoretical grounds. Numerous scholars have bemoaned the fact that the extensive focus on values in cross-cultural research reflects a *subjectivist* bias, where culture is reduced to factors that exist inside the individual's head (Earley & Mosakowski, 2002; Gabrenya, 1999; Morris et al., 2000). The focus on cross-cultural differences in internal values has taken place in the absence of a concomitant focus on external influences on behavior, such as cultural norms and constraints, social networks, and components of the larger social structure (i.e., what can be called a *structuralist approach*; Gabrenya, 1999; Morris et al., 2000). Akin to the long-standing debate in psychology regarding the role of personality and situations in determining behavior

(Mischel, 1977), cross-cultural research has focused mainly on person variables and has rarely focused on how external norms and constraints also help to explain cross-cultural differences in behavior.

In summary, although the use of values to understand cultural differences has dominated the field, there is growing recognition that new perspectives are needed to supplement this approach. Bond (1997) remarked that "it may be judicious for us to escape the thrall of values in cross-cultural work and augment our conceptual toolkit" (pp. 269–270). Earley and Mosakowski (2002) also urged that "now is an opportune time for researchers to move away from the tried and true friends of cultural values as the sole indicators of cultural differences" (p. 316). In much the same way, Mowday and Sutton (1993) argued that some of the most promising work on organizations is that which focuses on the external context in general and on external constraints in particular.

Purpose of This Article

In this article, we begin to fill this void by introducing a multilevel theory of *cultural tightness–looseness*, defined as the strength of social norms and the degree of sanctioning within societies. Scholars in anthropology (Pelto, 1968), sociology (Boldt, 1978a, 1978b), and psychology (Berry, 1966, 1967) have long argued that the strength of social norms and sanctioning is an important component of the societal normative context. Triandis (1989) later discussed tightness–looseness as a critical yet neglected dimension of cultural variation and one that is clearly differentiated from individualism–collectivism. Yet, perhaps because of the sheer focus on values, there has been almost no research attention to this dimension in modern societies, and discussions of cultural tightness–looseness as they relate to organizations are largely nonexistent.

Our theory of cultural tightness–looseness expands the literature in a number of ways. Following recommendations for multilevel theory building (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), we delineate both top-down and bottom-up processes that link external societal constraints—the strength of societal norms and sanctions—with individuals' psychological processes and organizational processes. In this way, our model provides a multilevel research agenda on how external societal constraints affect a wide range of phenomena.[1] The theory also has the potential to explain cross-cultural variation in new territory, including, for example, the relationships (a) between societal culture and accountability at the individual level, (b) between societal culture and organizational culture strength, alignment, and innovation at the organizational level, and (c) between societal culture and the dynamics of fit across multiple levels of analysis. Our theory also fills an important void by addressing how societal tightness–looseness relates to variance within societies. Culture scholars have recognized that there can be great variation within societies (Rohner, 1984; Strauss & Quinn, 1997), yet there is surprisingly little theory on precisely why there is marked variance within some societies and not others (Au, 1999; Schwartz & Sagie, 2000). We argue that the linkage between tightness–looseness and variance is not only important for advancing culture theory, but also has important methodological implications for the study of culture. Before introducing our model, we discuss the nature of tightness–looseness and its divergence from other dimensions of culture.

Tightness–Looseness Defined

Societal tightness–looseness has two key components: The strength of social norms, or how clear and pervasive norms are within societies, and the strength of sanctioning, or how much tolerance there is for deviance from norms within societies. Although there is little research on this dimension in modern societies, scholars in anthropology, sociology, and psychology discussed the importance of this dimension dating back to the 1960s and 1970s.

Pelto (1968), an anthropologist, was the first to theorize on tightness–looseness, arguing that traditional societies varied in their expression of and adherence to social norms. He identified the Pueblo Indians, Hutterites, and the Japanese as examples of tight societies, in which norms were expressed very clearly and unambiguously and in which severe sanctions were imposed on those who deviated from norms. By contrast, he identified the Skolt Lapps of northern Finland and the Thais as loose societies, in which norms were expressed through a wide variety of alternative channels, and in which there was a general lack of formality, order, and discipline and a high tolerance for deviant behavior. Pelto also identified a number of antecedents to tightness–looseness, including population density, kinship systems, and economic systems. For example, he argued that societies that have unilineal kinship systems (i.e., descent is traced through either the men or the women) tend to be tight, whereas societies that have bilateral kinship systems (i.e., descent is traced through both men and women) tend to be loose. He also argued that agricultural societies are tighter than hunting and gathering societies, given that the former require rigid norms to foster the coordination necessary to produce crops for survival. Within sociology, Boldt and his colleagues later supported this notion, showing that agricultural societies have clearly defined role expectations that leave little room for improvisation, whereas hunting and fishing societies have ambiguous role expectations that enable individuals to exercise their own preferences (Boldt, 1978a, 1978b; Boldt & Roberts, 1979).

In psychology, pioneering work by Berry (1966, 1967) showed that individuals in tightly structured agricultural settings (e.g., the Temne of Sierra Leone) exhibited lower psychological differentiation (i.e., a reduced sense of separation of the self from others; Witkin & Berry, 1975), as compared with individuals in loosely structured hunting and fishing settings (e.g., Eskimos). Similarly, Dawson (1967a, 1967b) found that in groups that had strict discipline (e.g., the Temne), children were more likely to develop a field-dependent cognitive style as compared with groups that have more lenient child-rearing practices (e.g., the Mende of Sierra Leone). After a general hiatus of research on the topic, Triandis reintroduced the dimension of tightness–looseness in 1989 and argued that it is an important yet neglected dimension of culture that is distinct from individualism–collectivism. Using the Human Relations Area Files, Carpenter (2000) supported this supposition in a study of ethnographies of 16 traditional societies. She found

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[1] Our focus on the strength of social norms and sanctioning is not the only way to characterize the external environment. Other approaches might focus on social roles (Chuang, 1998; McAuley, Bond, & Kashima, 2002; Triandis, 1972), social networks (Morris et al., 2000), or aspects of the external social structure (Parboteeah & Cullen, 2003).

that individualism–collectivism and tightness–looseness were only moderately correlated ($r = .44$).

In summary, early research in anthropology, sociology, and psychology showed the promise of tightness–looseness for understanding cultural differences. Across multiple disciplines, scholars demonstrated the importance of examining cultural differences in external constraints—the strength of external norms and sanctioning—a perspective that was not being tapped by the more common values approach. Nonetheless, scholarship on the topic has generally been at a standstill, and there has been almost no theorizing or research on tightness–looseness in modern societies or on organizations and individuals therein, a void we seek to begin filling in this article.

Tightness–Looseness: Divergent Validity

Before turning to our theory, it is worth noting what tightness–looseness is *not*, or in other words, how it diverges from other dimensions of culture. Tightness–looseness is not individualism–collectivism (Carpenter, 2000; Chan, Gelfand, Triandis, & Tzeng, 1996; Triandis, 1989). Individualism–collectivism refers to the degree to which societies emphasize having strong ties to in-groups versus being autonomous and looking after oneself (Hofstede, 1980), and it does not refer to how pervasive social norms are or to how much tolerance there is for deviance from norms within societies. We argue that there are societies or groups that are generally collectivistic and loose (e.g., Brazil), collectivistic and tight (e.g., Japan, Singapore), individualistic and loose (e.g., the United States, New Zealand), and individualistic and tight (e.g., Germany; cf. Chan et al., 1996; Triandis, 1989). As noted above, the differentiation of tightness–looseness and individualism–collectivism has also received empirical support in traditional societies (Carpenter, 2000). Tightness–looseness is also distinct from uncertainty avoidance, or the level of stress that is experienced in a society in the face of an unknown future (Hofstede, 1980). Although tight societies may be higher on uncertainty avoidance, it is also possible that the converse is true. Tight societies have many clear norms, and thus, stress deriving from uncertainty may be effectively eliminated among its citizens. For example, as we discuss later, Singapore is expected to be generally tight, yet it ranked the lowest on Hofstede's (1980) index of uncertainty avoidance. Tightness–looseness is also distinct from power distance, or the extent to which power is distributed equally in societies (Hofstede, 1980). Conceptually, strong norms and sanctioning can be reinforced and sustained in cultures that have a high degree of inequality (high power distance), as well as in cultures that have a high degree of equality (low power distance); thus, there should not be a strong correlation between the constructs.

In all, tightness–looseness captures unique cultural variance and is distinct from other cultural dimensions. Put differently, each of these dimensions explains different cultural variance. Individualism–collectivism relates to how behavior is influenced by one's in-group and/or family; power distance relates to how behavior is influenced by authorities; uncertainty avoidance relates to how behavior is influenced by stress and uncertainty; and tightness–looseness relates to how behavior is influenced by the strength of social norms and sanctioning. Tightness–looseness is unique and complementary to other cultural dimensions.

In this article, we focus on societal variation in tightness–looseness and propose that modern societies vary considerably in their strength of norms and sanctioning. However, we also emphasize that there is likely variability in tightness–looseness *within all societies*—across domains of life (e.g., Chan et al., 1996), regions (e.g., the North and South of the United States), or ethnic and religious groups (e.g., the Taliban)—a point to which we return later in the discussion.

> *Proposition 1A.* Tightness–looseness consists of the strength of social norms (number and clarity) and the strength of sanctioning (tolerance for deviance from norms).
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> *Proposition 1B.* Tightness–looseness is distinct from individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance. There is variation in tightness–looseness across societies and within societies (e.g., by region, ethnic group, domains of life).

A Multilevel Model of Tightness–Looseness

With tightness–looseness defined and differentiated from other constructs, we now turn to our multilevel model of societal tightness–looseness. In what follows, we discuss top-down, bottom-up, and moderating influences of societal tightness–looseness on organizations and individuals. As depicted in Figure 1, we first discuss cross-level linkages that relate societal tightness–looseness and individual-level characteristics and behavior, as well as variance across individuals (Propositions 2A–3B). We then discuss cross-level linkages that relate societal tightness–looseness to organizational practices and culture strength (Propositions 4A–4C) and discuss bottom-up processes through which individual-level characteristics reinforce organizational practices and culture strength (Propositions 5A and 5B). We discuss other contextual antecedents of tightness–looseness in organizations (Propositions 6A and 6B), as well as key outcomes associated with tightness–looseness at the organizational level (Proposition 7). We conclude with a discussion of the deleterious consequences of misfit, particularly in tight societies, across levels of analysis (Propositions 8–10). After clusters of propositions, we discuss specific research implications and measurement strategies that can be used to test the propositions.

Several overarching meta-theoretical themes become evident in our discussion of the model of tightness–looseness. First, a central issue that differentiates tight and loose societies is the amount of accountability (Tetlock, 1985, 2002) that exists at the societal and organizational levels and the degree of *felt accountability* (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) that exists at the individual level. To our knowledge, the model is one of the first to systematically integrate theory and research on accountability with culture. Additionally, felt accountability is a new psychological mechanism advanced to understand how external societal constraints are internalized and influence behavior. Second, tightness–looseness is related to the degree of variance at multiple levels in societies. We argue that the strength of norms and monitoring in tight societies reduces the range of variation at multiple levels of analysis, generally evidencing itself in higher socially shared cognition and similarity in behavior among individuals, higher culture strength and alignment in organizations, and greater institutional pressures and, thus, more similarity across organizations as compared with loose societies. Third, tightness–looseness is expected to have quasi-isomorphic
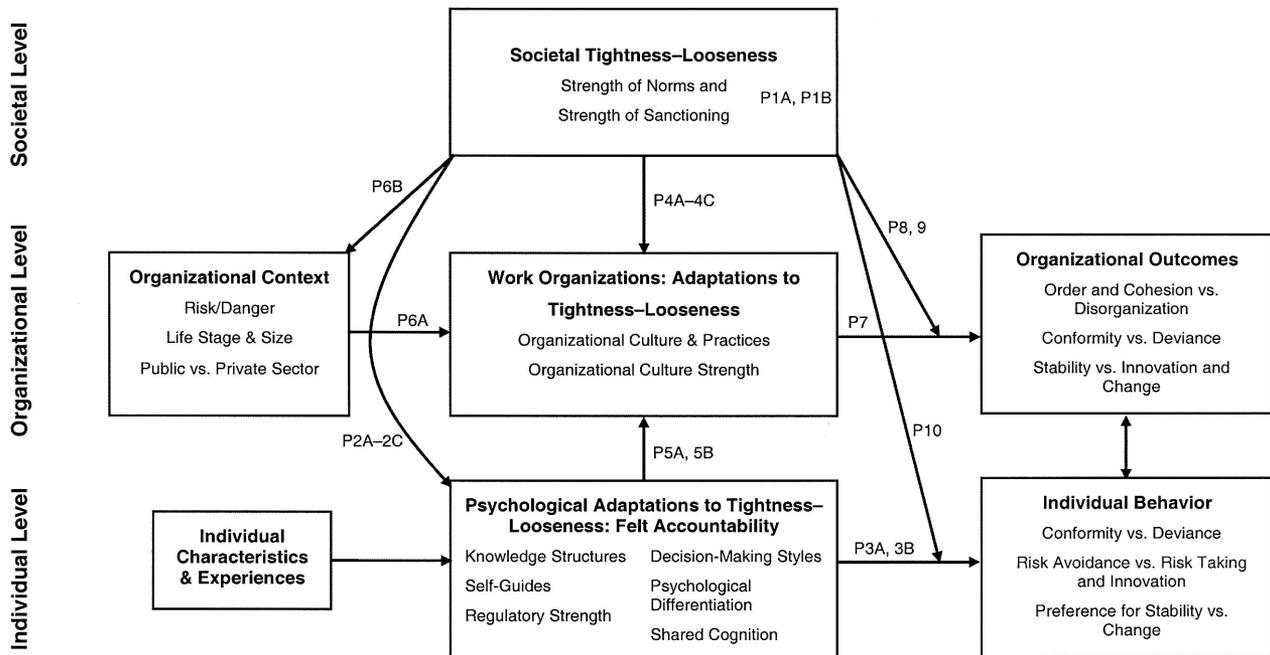
Figure 1.   A multilevel model of tightness–looseness. P = proposition.

effects across levels of analysis. Key outcomes associated with tightness include order and efficiency, conformity, and low rates of change. Key outcomes associated with looseness include social disorganization, deviance, innovation, and openness to change. Finally, a key theme pervading the model is the notion of adaptation: organizations adapting to the society and individuals adapting to societies and organizations. We also discuss the negative effects that occur when there is a lack of adaptation or fit in the system, particularly in tight societies.

Cross-Level Effects of Societal Tightness–Looseness and Psychological Attributes: Means and Variance

In Propositions 2A–3B, we discuss socialization processes in tight and loose societies and their influence on the "range and focus of personal variation that is acceptable and rewarded" (Scarr, 1993, p. 1337). In short, we argue that societal institutions in tight societies promote *narrow socialization* (Arnett, 1995), in that they have more constraint and highly developed systems of monitoring and sanctioning behavior. In contrast, societal institutions in loose societies promote *broad socialization* (Arnett, 1995), in that they have lower constraint and weakly developed systems of monitoring and sanctioning behavior. As we argue below, this in turn affects variations in the psychology of felt accountability at the individual level and a number of derivative cognitions, self-definitions, and personal characteristics, as well as the degree of socially shared cognition within societies.

Broad versus narrow socialization.   Families and teachers are the first to inculcate broad versus narrow socialization in loose and tight societies, respectively. In tight societies, parents emphasize rule abidance, monitor their children's behavior, and have stricter socialization tactics (Halloway, 1999; Ho, 1981; Pearson, 1984). A

good child is one who abides by rules (e.g., *sunao* in Japan, *Li-chiao* in China; Ruiz & Tanaka, 2001). Parents in loose societies encourage more exploration among children and impose punishments that are more lenient. American mothers, for example, are much more permissive than Chinese (L. H. Chiu, 1987; Ryback, Sanders, Lorentz, & Koestenblatt, 1980), Korean (Hupp, Lam, & Jaeger, 1992), and Japanese mothers (Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, Cole, Mizuta, & Hiruma, 1996). Educational institutions also reinforce broad versus narrow socialization in tight versus loose societies. In Japanese classrooms, for example, teachers demand strict obedience from students, carefully monitor their behavior, and provide detailed reports to parents (Holzer, 2000; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Monitoring of behavior need not come only from teachers in tight societies. In Syria, children are expected to inform their parents about teachers or others who may be deviating from government mandates (Hopwood, 1988). Children in China engage in reciprocal peer monitoring to make sure that their peers behave appropriately (Chen, 2000). In all, rules and monitoring of behavior are much more pervasive in child-rearing and educational practices in tight versus loose societies.

Broad versus narrow socialization is also reinforced in loose and tight societies through the media and criminal justice systems. Media in tight societies (e.g., Singapore, Saudi Arabia) foster narrow socialization by being more restricted and regulated in their content (Sussman & Karlekar, 2002). By contrast, media in loose societies (e.g., the United States, New Zealand) foster broad socialization by being open and diverse in their content and by being subject to few regulations, political pressures, and controls on what is acceptable (Sussman & Karlekar, 2002). The nature of criminal justice systems also reinforces broad versus narrow socialization across societies. In tight societies, there is a wider range of of-

fenses that are punishable (e.g., importing chewing gum and failing to flush toilets in Singapore; Parkes, 2001; Soltani, 2003), and there is a greater likelihood of punishing offenders for crimes committed (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). Tight societies also impose stricter sanctions for crimes as compared with loose societies (e.g., amputation of feet and caning in Iran and Saudi Arabia; death penalty for drug offenses in Singapore; Amnesty International, 2002, 2004). In summary, individuals are socialized in a variety of societal institutions, and these institutions differ in the degree to which they promote narrow versus broad socialization in tight versus loose societies, respectively.

> *Proposition 2A.* Societal institutions in tight societies generally foster narrow socialization whereas societal institutions in loose societies generally foster broad socialization.

Proposition 2A reflects the importance of examining the nature of societal institutions across cultures. Cross-cultural research has increasingly become reductionist, focusing mainly on culture inside the head of individuals (Aycan, 2000; Gabrenya, 1999; Morris et al., 2000). The study of societal institutions is often seen as a priority among sociologists, political scientists, and economists (Parboteeah & Cullen, 2003), yet future research would benefit from integrating these macroperspectives with the microfocus typically favored by cross-cultural psychologists.

A key challenge for culture scholars is to propose and validate dimensions of societal institutions and link these to dimensions of culture. Proposition 2A highlights one such dimension of societal institutions, namely broad versus narrow socialization, which applies to the media, criminal justice systems, education, and so forth and which is conceptually linked to societal tightness–looseness. Archival databases can be used to infer the degree of broad versus narrow socialization within societies (e.g., openness of the media and penalties for crimes; Amnesty International, 2002; freedomhouse.org). Attitudes of parents and teachers regarding broad versus narrow socialization can also be examined through surveys, interviews, and observations. Clearly, our discussion of societal institutions is not exhaustive. Future research would benefit from examining broad versus narrow socialization in other institutions as well.

Psychological adaptations: Felt accountability. At the individual level, we theorize that societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on a psychological syndrome of felt accountability. Felt accountability is the subjective experience that one's actions are subject to evaluation and that there are potential punishments based on these evaluations (Frink & Klimoski, 1998, 2004; Tetlock, 1985). Although individuals in all societies experience some degree of felt accountability to external standards, we propose that accountability is subjectively experienced and felt to a much greater degree in tight than in loose societies. Put differently, individuals in tight societies inhabit a social world where they feel a heightened scrutiny of their actions and expect violations of norms to be met with stronger punishments as compared with individuals in loose societies.

In our model, felt accountability is a psychological syndrome that has a number of derivative cognitions, self-definitions, and personal characteristics, which are discussed in turn. Felt accountability is also advanced as a psychological mechanism through which external societal constraints ultimately influence behavior (Propositions 3A and 3B).

Knowledge structures. In tight societies wherein there are strong norms and sanctioning, individuals need to have an extremely "reliable mental compass" (Tetlock, 2002, p. 453) regarding normative expectations. We theorize that individuals in tight societies have higher *cognitive accessibility* of normative requirements as compared with individuals in loose societies. Social psychological research has illustrated that norms are cognitively represented in memory as associations between normative behaviors and situations. Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) found, for example, that there are individual differences in *normative associative strength* (i.e., strength of the association between situations and normative behavior), which are due to differences in social backgrounds where links between situations and norms are more or less emphasized. We predict that normative associative strength is expected to be higher in tight than loose societies given the narrow socialization across societal institutions that dictate expected behaviors.

Self-guides. The nature of the self is expected to vary across tight and loose societies. Ideal self-guides indicate what a person hopes or aspires to be, whereas ought self-guides indicate what a person believes is his or her responsibility to be. Ought self-guides can be based on prescriptions from close others, which should be related to collectivism. Ought self-guides can also be based on prescriptions from the generalized society, which are referred to as normative ought-self guides (Higgins, 1996). We predict that individuals in tight societies, who have higher felt accountability, tend to have chronic accessibility of *normative ought self-guides* and a prevention regulatory focus (i.e., a focus on not making mistakes). For example, the phenomenon of *Kiasu,* in which "the emphasis is on not losing rather than winning or on reducing risk of failure, rather than striving for success" (Wu & Dai, 2001, p. 10; see also Ramakrishnan, 1998), reflects the prevention focus that is pervasive in Singapore. By contrast, individuals in loose societies, who have lower felt accountability, tend to have chronic accessibility of ideal self-guides and have more of a promotion focus (i.e., a focus on achieving goals or targets).

Regulatory strength. Individuals in all societies monitor and evaluate their behavior to detect discrepancies from standards, and have negative self-reactions when such discrepancies occur (Bandura, 1982; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Kanfer, 1990). However, there are individual differences in these processes, collectively known as *regulatory strength* (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). We extend this theory by proposing that individuals in tight societies generally have higher self-regulatory strength than individuals in loose societies. Individuals in tight societies, where there is higher felt accountability, engage in more frequent monitoring of their behavior vis-à-vis social norms, are more attentive to discrepancies from norms, and have more intense negative self-reactions when their behavior errs from standards, as compared with individuals in loose societies. Put simply, the high (or low) degree of social regulation at the societal level is mirrored in the high (or low) amount of self-regulation at the individual level in tight and loose societies, respectively. This is consistent with Seeley and Gardner (2003), who found that Caucasians have lower self-regulatory strength as compared with Asians.

We expect that individuals in tight societies not only are attentive to their own behavior vis-à-vis external standards, but also have an enhanced attentiveness and negative reactions to others' violations, as compared with individuals in loose societies. Tetlock

(2002) referred to this psychological mind-set as one of an *intuitive prosecutor* who is concerned with upholding the social order, is acutely attuned to notice norm violations, and is motivated to sanction others (Rucker, Polifroni, Tetlock, & Scott, 2004). Because maintaining social order is important in tight societies, we expect that individuals have an intuitive prosecutor mind-set more cognitively accessible. By contrast, in loose societies, deviance by others is less likely to be noticed, and even when it is noticed, it is much more tolerated. Gelfand, Nishii, Chan, Yamaguchi, and Triandis (1998), for example, found that the Japanese had more negative reactions to norm violations and were more supportive of sanctioning violators, as compared with Americans.

Decision-making styles. Societal tightness–looseness is expected to relate to preferred ways of gathering, processing, and evaluating information when solving problems and to *adaptor* and *innovator* cognitive styles (Kirton, 1976) in particular. Adaptors prefer to derive ideas for solutions to problems by using established procedures and have been characterized as being cautious, reliable, efficient, and disciplined (Kirton, 1976; Kirton & Baily, 1991). We expect this style to be generally preferred in tight societies, where there is high felt accountability to external standards and expectations of punishment for deviations. By contrast, innovators prefer to challenge established rules and procedures, ignore constraints of prevailing paradigms, and derive their ideas for solutions from outside of the system (Kirton & Baily, 1991). Innovators have been characterized as being original and risk seeking, yet also as undisciplined, impractical, and disrespectful of customs (Kirton & Baily, 1991). We expect this style to be generally preferred in loose societies, where there is less felt accountability to standards and less threat of punishment for deviations. More formally, we predict

> *Proposition 2B.* Societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on felt accountability at the individual level. Individuals in tight (versus loose) societies generally have higher (or lower) accessibility of normative requirements, a greater prevention (or promotion) focus, higher (or lower) regulatory strength, and greater preference for adaptor (or innovator) cognitive styles.

Variance. We propose that the degree of variation across individuals (e.g., personal dispositions, attitudes, expectations) is in part a function of the tightness–looseness of the societal context. In societies where there are strong norms that clearly prescribe appropriate behavior, individuals share many *common experiences* and thus are likely to develop higher between-person similarities. By contrast, when norms are comparatively weaker and there is less constraint, people have more varied and *idiosyncratic experiences*, and thus individual attributes are more likely to diverge (cf. House, Rousseau, & Thomas-Hunt, 1995; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). The degree of variation in individual differences across societies helps to reinforce and maintain the tightness–looseness of the societal context. Less variation in tight as compared with loose societies enables individuals to mutually reinforce normative expectations, which ultimately enhances predictability and order.

> *Proposition 2C.* Societal tightness–looseness affects variance across individuals in individual attributes (e.g., attitudes, beliefs). There is generally less variance across individuals in tight versus loose societies.

Propositions 2B and 2C suggest a number of directions for cross-cultural research. Numerous constructs discussed in Proposition 2B (i.e., normative associative strength, ought self-guides, self-regulation strength) have received little attention in cross-cultural research. We advance that societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on these constructs, thus potentially explaining new variance at the individual level. Moreover, these individual-level constructs largely exist in isolated literatures with different theoretical traditions, and little theory has been advanced to highlight their underlying commonalities. By examining these individual-level constructs within the context of external constraints in societies, we illustrate why these variables may be correlated at the individual level, as they all are indicative of a focus (or lack thereof) on adapting to existing normative requirements in the societal context. There are well-developed measures of many of these constructs that can be adapted for cross-cultural research (see Higgins, Friedman, & Harlow, 2001; Seeley & Gardner, 2003; and Kirton, 1976). Cross-cultural differences in accessibility of normative requirements can be measured through unobtrusive measures including reaction times (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003).

Proposition 2B also illustrates how the external normative context influences psychological processes at the individual level, thus furthering psychologists' understanding of how external structuralist perspectives affect internal subjectivist phenomena. Individuals are socialized into the external normative context through key societal institutions, thereby developing psychological characteristics that fit with the cultural context. Once socialized, individuals sustain the predominant levels of tightness–looseness by further developing institutions that are consistent with their psychological characteristics. We return to these mutually reinforcing processes in Propositions 5A and 5B, and we discuss the mediating mechanism of felt accountability characteristics on behavior in Propositions 3A and 3B. More generally, Proposition 2B clearly differentiates the societal level from the individual level and helps to avoid levels-of-analysis confusion that is endemic in the cross-cultural literature. Rather than discussing tight versus loose individuals, we advance a psychology of felt accountability and its constituent elements at the individual level that is qualitatively different from, but theoretically related to, societal-level constructs.

Last, Proposition 2C points to an important area for cross-cultural research, namely understanding and explaining variance within societies. With few exceptions (Au, 1999; Schwartz & Sagie, 2000), research has focused exclusively on differences in means across cultures and has rarely examined whether cultures vary predictably in terms of variance. Echoing these sentiments, Earley and Mosakowski (2002) recently asked, "Might other characteristics of a distribution (e.g., variance, skewness) convey important meaning concerning culture?" (p. 313). Proposition 2C begins to address the dearth of theorizing on this issue, illustrating that the degree of sharedness among individuals is likely to be, at least in part, a function of the strength of the external constraints that are encountered in the societal context. This proposition also has a number of methodological implications. It suggests that cross-cultural research should begin examining *dispersion constructs* (e.g., r_{wg}, standard deviation, coefficient of variation; Chan, 1998) as important dependent variables in and of their own right. Such data are as readily available as means in survey

measures of attitudes and beliefs. Other measures of shared mental models, such as pathfinder (Schvaneveldt, 1990) and cognitive mapping (Bougon, 1983), can assess variance across cultures. From a methodological perspective, Proposition 2C suggests that research should move beyond using measures of dispersion within cultures only to justify aggregation, as such variance measures may be indicative of important cultural differences.

Societal Tightness–Looseness and Cross-Level Effects on Individual Behavior

In Propositions 3A and 3B, we discuss the effect that societal tightness–looseness has on individual-level behavior and variability in behavior as mediated by the psychological attributes previously discussed. As seen in Figure 1, individuals in tight and loose societies differ in their willingness to conform versus act in socially deviant ways. This is consistent with research on accountability processes by Tetlock and others that has shown that felt accountability induces conformity when normative standards are known (Cummings & Anton, 1990; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Tetlock, 1992; Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989), as well as with research that has shown that individuals who prefer predictability and order rely on well-learned scripts to guide their behavior (C. Y. Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000).

Further, individuals in tight and loose societies are expected to generally differ in their willingness to engage in risk taking and innovative behaviors as compared with risk-avoidance behaviors. Across multiple literatures, research has shown that individuals who have a high promotion focus (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Friedman & Förster, 2001; Levine, Higgins, & Choi, 2000), positive attitudes toward errors (Rybowiak, Garst, Frese, & Batinic, 1999), and an openness to experience (George & Zhou, 2001)—all attributes we expect to be cultivated in loose societies—tend to engage in more risk taking and innovative behavior. Individuals who seek predictability and order, by contrast, tend to avoid ambiguous and novel situations (e.g., Moskowitz, 1993; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993) and are generally less creative (George & Zhou, 2001). As George and Zhou (2001) explained, "conforming, controlling one's impulses, following rules, and striving to achieve predetermined goals all may go against seeking to change the status quo and coming up with new and better ways of doing things" (p. 515).

Last, individuals in tight and loose societies are expected to differ behaviorally in their openness to change versus preference for stability. This is consistent with research that has shown that a prevention (versus promotion) focus is negatively associated with changing one's course of action (Liberman, Idson, Camacho, & Higgins, 1999) and is consistent with research that has shown that a fear of errors and mistakes, a mind-set we expect is common in tight cultures, is also related to resistance to change (Rybowiak et al., 1999; see also Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999).

Proposition 3A. Societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on individual behavior as mediated by felt accountability psychological attributes. Individuals in tight societies tend to enact behaviors characteristic of conformity, risk avoidance, and stability seeking, whereas individuals in loose societies tend to enact behaviors characteristic of deviance, risk seeking, and openness to change.

It is worth noting that this discussion also implies that there is less *variability* in individual behavior in tight than loose societies.

In societies where there is more conformity, less risk taking, and an emphasis on stability, there is greater *similarity* across individuals in their behaviors across situations. By contrast, in societies where there is more deviance, more risk taking, and openness to change, there is greater idiosyncrasy in behaviors of individuals across situations.

Proposition 3B. Societal tightness–looseness affects variability in behavior. Behavior across individuals is more variable in loose than in tight societies.

Propositions 3A and 3B suggest a number of directions for future research. Proposition 3A illustrates the value of moving beyond values in cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural differences in behavior need not always be linked to values or guiding principles one has in life—but may also be explained by felt accountability that is derived from external constraints and normative requirements in the societal context. Conceptually, this is consistent with Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), who showed that behavior is a function of attitudes as well as perceptions of subjective norms. Moreover, this approach may explain why values do not always consistently predict behavior in cross-cultural research (Bond, 1997). For example, Proposition 3A suggests that perceptions of the normative context are likely to loom large in predicting behavior in tight societies, whereas one's individual values may predict behavior more in loose societies.

Proposition 3A also highlights the need to study behaviors such as deviance and openness to change across cultures. Data on these issues can be examined by adapting existing measures of deviance, innovation, and coping with change for cross-cultural research (see Bennett & Robinson, 2000; George & Zhou, 2001; Judge et al., 1999, respectively). Likewise, laboratory studies can be designed to examine cross-cultural differences in risk taking and willingness to change courses of action. For example, researchers could use Liberman et al.'s (1999) paradigm to collect data across cultures to see if individuals in loose societies are more likely, as compared with individuals in tight societies, to change their course of action when given the opportunity in an experimental task (see also Levine et al., 2000). Finally, Proposition 3B highlights the need to study cultural variation in variability of behavior. Measures of variability of behavior are as readily available as measures of means and should also be reported in cross-cultural studies.

Organizational Adaptations to Tightness–Looseness: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Processes

We next consider cross-level effects of societal tightness–looseness on organizational phenomena. Figure 1 illustrates that organizational culture and practices, as well as organizational culture strength, are related to societal tightness–looseness through both top-down and bottom-up processes.

Top-down effects of societal tightness–looseness on organizations. Organizational theorists have long argued that work institutions are open systems that perpetuate and reinforce dominant norms in the societal context (e.g., Emery & Trist, 1965; D. Katz & Kahn, 1978). We argue that there are top-down, cross-level societal effects such that work organizations generally speaking reflect the degree of tightness–looseness in the larger society. Organizations in tight societies generally have cultures of high constraint, wherein there are practices that limit the range of

acceptable behavior and facilitate order and predictability. Organizations in loose societies generally have cultures with more latitude, wherein there are practices that allow for a wider range of acceptable behavior and that facilitate experimentation, openness, and risk taking.[2]

The notion that organizational cultures differ on the extent to which they emphasize rules and predictability versus flexibility and experimentation has a long history in the organizational sciences (Litwin & Stringer, 1968; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996; Quinn, 1988; Rousseau, 1990). Quinn (1988) described flexibility versus control as one of the most important dimensions that differentiate organizational cultures. Similarly, in their Organizational Culture Profile, O'Reilly et al. (1991) contrasted organizations that emphasize innovation (e.g., experimentation, risk taking, not being rule oriented) with those that emphasize stability (e.g., rule oriented, focused on predictability, focused on stability). Research outside of the United States has also shown that flexibility and experimentation versus rule orientation is a central dimension of organizational culture (Dastmalchian, Lee, & Ng, 2000; Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; Verberg, Drenth, Koopman, van Muijen, & Wang, 1999).

Although there has been little theorizing on societal top-down effects on organizational rules versus flexibility, there is some indirect evidence that supports our linkage of societal tightness–looseness to this dimension of organizational culture. Dastmalchian et al. (2000) found that Korean organizations were higher on rigidity and control than Canadian organizations. Likewise, Morishima (1995) characterized many organizations in Japan as learning bureaucracies wherein "codified rules and legitimized practices all work to rationalize Japanese employment and bring predictability and control to the behavior of the major actors, employees and employers" (p. 119). Wächter and Stengelhofen (1995) argued that organizations in Germany generally have many rules and monitor individuals through extensive and detailed record keeping. On the basis of this discussion, we predict the following:

> *Proposition 4A.* Societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on organizational culture. Organizations in tight societies generally emphasize rules and predictability and have cultures of higher constraint. Organizations in loose societies generally emphasize flexibility and experimentation and have cultures of lower constraint.

Societal tightness–looseness also has top-down effects on a number of organizational practices. We expect that selection and recruitment strategies are much stronger in organizations in tight versus loose societies, meaning that organizations in tight societies seek to restrict the range of individuals who enter the organization and to select individuals who match the organizational culture, to a greater extent than do organizations in loose societies. For example, Japanese organizations have historically given preference to recruiting from a narrow range of universities (Fliaster, 2001) and to recruiting individuals within cohorts at the same time every year so they have similar experiences (Morishima, 1995). Similarly, upper-level managers in many British organizations have historically been educated at Eton and then at Cambridge or Oxford (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Relying on a more narrow range of sources that are very well known to employers can increase the reliability of information about potential employees

and hence can increase predictability about how they will fit into the organization.

The types of attributes that are emphasized during the selection process are expected to vary in tight and loose societies. Identifying knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees to match the requirements of the job is expected to be the primary emphasis of selection in loose societies. The match of the person to the organization's norms—selecting those who will fit into and support the existing culture—is expected to be the primary emphasis in tight societies. For example, Fujiwara (1993) found that fewer than 10% of organizations in Japan indicated that they prioritized technical expertise in the selection process; rather, important criteria for selection included the trainability of potential candidates and their ability to be good organizational citizens and uphold organizational standards (Morishima, 1995).

We also theorize that socialization and training processes are much stronger in organizations in tight versus loose societies, as intensive training and socialization are essential for conveying organizational standards and enhancing accountability (Aoki, 1988; Morishima, 1995; Redding, Norman, & Schlander, 1994). For example, as compared with their American counterparts, employees in Japanese companies participate in longer and more extensive formal orientation programs and continue in training and socialization efforts for much longer (Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1985; Morishima, 1995).

Finally, we theorize that there are more well-developed performance-monitoring systems in organizations in tight as compared with loose societies. In tight societies, employees are monitored more on a continual basis and are punished more severely for violating organizational norms. In many Japanese organizations, for example, there is continuous assessment of employee behavior (Aoki, 1988; Jennings, Cyr, & Moore, 1995; Morishima, 1995). Employees expect to receive strong sanctions for occupationally deviant behavior and perceive much greater threats of shame for such acts, as compared with Americans (Kobayashi, 1998). Similarly, in Saudi Arabia and Iran, workplace behavior that deviates from Islamic teachings is seen as a threat to organizational stability and is generally not tolerated (Ali, 1993; Mellahi & Wood, 2001; Tayeb, 2001).

> *Proposition 4B.* Societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on organizational practices pertaining to control versus flexibility. Organizations in tight societies generally have stronger recruitment, selection, and training practices and have more well-developed performance-monitoring systems, as compared with organizations in loose societies.

Propositions 4A and 4B highlight a number of future directions for cross-cultural research. Theory and research linking societal and organizational culture are still relatively rare, despite the recognition that organizations are open systems that are influenced by the societal context. A critical challenge is to develop theory that links specific societal dimensions of culture with specific organizational dimensions of culture (e.g., Aycan et al., 1999; House et al., 2004). The dimension of organizational flexibility versus control has consistently been demonstrated to be a key

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[2] Of course, there is variability across organizations in all societies, a point to which we return later.

aspect of organizational culture, yet little research has examined the dimensions of societal culture that influence this aspect of organizational culture. Accordingly, Proposition 4A offers a theoretical linkage that should be examined in future research. Multilevel modeling techniques that link measures of societal tightness–looseness with measures of organizational flexibility versus control (e.g., Dastmalchian et al., 2000; O'Reilly et al., 1991) can be used to test this proposition. Ethnographic techniques (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983) can also be used to assess cross-cultural variation in organizational flexibility vs. control.

Proposition 4A also has some implications for global organizations that need to negotiate between the organizational cultures of their home and host organizations. To the extent that there is societal variation in organizational flexibility and control, this could create cultural conflicts among joint ventures and acquisitions that take place between organizations from tight and loose societies. Future research would benefit from examining conflict and performance among joint ventures between organizations from tight and loose societies. The performance of international joint ventures can be assessed through objective performance measures, including profitability and growth and the survival, stability, and duration of international joint ventures, as well as through subjective measures, such as the satisfaction of the partners in international joint ventures (Geringer & Herbert, 1991). It would also be useful to examine the process of integration in joint ventures between organizations from tight and loose societies. For example, organizations from tight societies would likely exercise greater control in international joint ventures (cf. Pan, 2002) and would maintain greater uniformity in practices across its global units (i.e., globalize rather than localize its practices). Researchers can examine whether there are cultural differences in *globalization* versus *localization* of practices with measures that assess whether the focal firm's human resource management practices are similar to those of the multinational corporation's home country operations (e.g., see Lu & Bjorkman, 1997; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994).

Finally, Proposition 4B expands the international human resource management literature by linking societal tightness–looseness with specific organizational practices that constrain versus permit variability in employee behaviors. Such data are readily available, for example, from the Cranfield Network on Comparative Human Resource Management, which collects longitudinal, standardized data on recruitment and selection activities, flexibility and alternative working practices, employee development, and employee compensation and benefits in over 30 countries (e.g., Brewster et al., 2000). This proposition also has implications for attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) processes (Schneider, 1987) across societies. Given that organizations in tight societies have much more restrictive recruitment and selection processes, and given that individuals who do not fit the context are much more likely to be mistreated in tight societies (see Proposition 10), we would expect that the ASA model, and its consequences for increased homogeneity in organizations, would be even more acute in tight societies. Research on the ASA model in non-Western cultures is rare; thus cross-cultural research on this model is a critical future research direction (see Schneider, Smith, Taylor, & Fleenor, 1998; Ziegert, 2002, for tests of the ASA model).

Societal tightness–looseness and variance in organizations. Societal tightness–looseness also has implications for variance in organizations. The organizational practices discussed above collectively produce homogeneity (i.e., consensus) in perceptions about organizational norms and practices and thus produce strong organizational cultures. Organizations with strong cultures have clear and agreed-on norms that guide employees' perceptions of appropriate actions (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Cooke & Szumal, 1993; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). To the extent that organizations provide intensive socialization and training, continuous feedback and performance appraisal, and recruitment and selection systems that ensure that experiences are shared among employees, there are, generally speaking, stronger organizational cultures in tight societies and comparatively weaker organizational cultures in loose societies. This is consistent with research that has shown that the extensiveness of socialization practices is associated with employees' shared perceptions of the work environment (Malamaut, 2002; Peterson, 1984), as well as with research that has shown that accountability in organizations produces higher socially shared cognition (Frink & Klimoski, 1998; Rozelle & Baxter, 1981).

Homogeneity of thought is also facilitated in organizations in tight societies by a high degree of alignment or *bundling* across organizational practices that communicate similar expectations to individuals (Baird & Meshoulam, 1988; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delery, 1998; Wright & McMahan, 1992). Morishima (1995) described how human resource management systems in Japan are generally aligned to enhance the acquisition of knowledge and to create socially shared understandings of that knowledge. In loose societies, alignment across organizational practices is expected to be lower, and there is more inconsistency in the messages sent through organizational practices. Similar to parents having more latitude to socialize their children, as described in Proposition 2A, managers in loose societies are likely to be given discretion in deciding how (or whether) to implement organizational practices and procedures, which further enhances the likelihood that employees receive divergent messages about the organizational context. Consistent with this notion, Crossland and Hambrick (2005) found that managerial discretion is greater in the United States as compared with Japan and Germany. In all, both the nature of organizational practices (e.g., intensive socialization, continuous feedback) and the alignment across organizational practices results in stronger (versus weaker) organizational cultures in tight (versus loose) societies.

> *Proposition 4C.* Societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on the strength of organizational cultures. There are stronger organizational cultures and higher alignment across practices in organizations in tight as compared with loose societies.

The role that the societal context plays in organizational culture strength has received scant attention. This proposition can be tested by examining the relationship of societal culture measures with measures of climate and culture strength (e.g., standard deviation, variance, or average deviation indices; Gonzalez-Roma, Peiro, & Tordera, 2002; Lindell & Brandt, 2000; Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Likewise, the study of alignment of organizational practices has received increasing attention, yet has not been examined from a cross-cultural perspective. Researchers can examine the cross-level relationship between societal tightness–looseness and measures of alignment in organizations, either through surveying managers about the extent to which they perceive their organizational practices as being consistent (e.g.,

Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001) or by surveying employees about the extent to which they perceive consistent messages across human resources practices (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000; Nishii & Wright, in press).

Bottom-up processes reinforcing tightness in organizations. Bottom-up processes that relate psychological characteristics to organizational characteristics are also an important component of our model. To the extent that individuals in tight societies have higher felt accountability psychological attributes (e.g., high accessibility of normative requirements, a prevention regulatory focus, high regulatory strength), they establish shared norms that emphasize order, predictability, and control. By contrast, to the extent that individuals in loose societies have lower felt accountability psychological attributes (e.g., low accessibility of normative requirements, a promotion regulatory focus, low self-regulatory strength), they create and sustain norms that emphasize flexibility, experimentation, and risk taking. Put differently, through social interactions, employees' psychological attributes and behaviors become amplified and manifested in higher level collective phenomena (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). For example, Levine et al. (2000) subtly manipulated groups' promotion versus prevention focus on a memory recognition task and demonstrated that over time, groups with a prevention focus converged on risk-averse solutions, whereas groups with a promotion focus converged on risky solutions. Accordingly, the development of shared collective realities in organizations based on individuals' felt accountability psychological attributes is one important bottom-up mechanism through which levels of tightness–looseness in organizations are developed and sustained.

> *Proposition 5A.* Through bottom-up processes, psychological felt accountability characteristics (e.g., accessibility of normative requirements, regulatory focus and strength) influence the level of tightness and looseness in organizations.

Bottom-up processes in tight and loose societies also further contribute to the strength of organizational cultures discussed earlier. Higher socially shared cognition and lower variability in behavior make it easier for the bottom-up emergence of strong organizational cultures to occur in tight societies. Likewise, bottom-up emergence is more likely to occur in contexts where there is a high degree of social influence pressures, intensive social interaction, and strong socialization (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), all of which we expect to be more common in tight societies. As we discuss at length later, because the consequences of a lack of fit are much more acute in tight societies, individuals who are different are more likely to leave organizations, further enhancing the emergence of strong organizational cultures in tight versus loose societies.

> *Proposition 5B.* Through bottom-up processes, psychological felt accountability characteristics (e.g., accessibility of normative requirements, regulatory focus and strength) influence the strength of organizational cultures.

To date, much of the literature has focused on top-down effects of societal culture. Propositions 5A and 5B recognize that bottom-up processes—which link individuals' attributes to organizational phenomena—are yet another mechanism through which cross-cultural differences are reinforced and sustained. Several

possibilities emerge for future research. Qualitative and quantitative research methods could examine the types of group norms that emerge over time across cultures as a function of the felt accountability attributes discussed previously. For example, following the methodology of Bartel and Saavedra (2000), who examined the collective construction of group moods, one could use observational techniques to code the verbal and nonverbal elements of group interactions that encourage flexibility versus control across cultures. Quantitative methodologies for longitudinal data analysis (e.g., latent growth modeling; Chan, 2003) are also useful for examining the emergence of group norms regarding flexibility and control across time as a function of a cultural group's profile on felt accountability characteristics.

Organizational Context Factors and Societal Tightness–Looseness

Before turning to the outcomes associated with tightness–looseness within organizations, we briefly discuss organizational context factors that also affect tightness and looseness in organizations. It would be an oversimplification to argue that there are only societal forces that affect tightness–looseness in organizations. Proposition 6A illustrates that there are a number of organizational context variables that affect the degree to which organizations are tight versus loose within all societies. For example, in all societies, high-risk organizational systems are expected to be tighter compared with low-risk organizational systems. In nuclear power plants, a prototypical high-risk system, many rules and mutual monitoring are in place to minimize the potential for catastrophic error (Klein, Bigley, & Roberts, 1995). As a general rule, organizations in all societies that deal with conditions of great threat, danger, and vulnerability (e.g., the army) are expected to be tighter, regardless of the societal culture context. As McKelvey (1982) cogently argued, "Environmental threat more than anything else seems to be accompanied by organizations having tight and extensive control systems" (p. 186). Organizational life stage is also expected to affect the degree to which organizations emphasize tightness or looseness, with young start-up firms being looser (e.g., emphasizing flexibility, experimentation) and older, more mature organizations being tighter (e.g., emphasizing rules, stability, predictability; cf. Hanks, Watson, Jansen, & Chandler, 1993; Olson & Terpstra, 1992). Ownership is also predicted to relate to tightness–looseness in organizations. Public organizations tend to have many rules, strict reporting requirements, and clear control mechanisms because of their multiple stakeholders and lack of market incentives (Marsden, Cook, & Knoke, 1994). By comparison, private organizations tend to be more flexible and innovative because they are not as restricted by external rules and governing bodies and because market pressures dictate flexibility for survival (Kurland & Egan, 1999).

Finally, in our model, societal tightness–looseness directly affects the contexts in which organizations are embedded (Proposition 6B). For example, we expect that more public organizations as well as mature and firmly regimented organizations persist in tight as compared with loose societies. Put differently, organizational forms and industries that are consonant with the broader societal emphasis on flexibility and control are most likely to prosper and thrive in loose versus tight societies, respectively. This general notion can be traced to Adam Smith (1776/1976) and David

Ricardo (1817/1971), who argued that countries excel by specializing in the organizational forms in which they possess comparative advantage.

> *Proposition 6A.* Tight versus loose organizational cultures are influenced by features of the organizational context (e.g., risk, age, and ownership).

> *Proposition 6B.* Societal tightness–looseness influences features of organizational context.

Propositions 6A and 6B point to some needed directions for cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural research and theory often treat organizational phenomena as being unitary within national cultures (Aycan et al., 1999) when, in fact, there is much organizational variation within societies because of powerful institutional forces (e.g., industry, ownership) and organizational variables (e.g., size, structure, technology; Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Gordon, 1991). A key theoretical challenge is to identify specific organizational context factors that are associated with specific dimensions of organizational culture. Proposition 6A highlights particular contextual forces that can produce variation in tightness and looseness in organizations within societies, opening up relatively uncharted territory for organizational research (see also Dastmalchian et al., 2000). Proposition 6A also links previously isolated contextual phenomena through a common lens. For example, our review illustrates some theoretical similarities among organizational context factors, such as industry, environmental vulnerability, and life stage that may not have been readily apparent previously. Finally, Proposition 6B indicates that there could be societal variation in organizational context variables, thereby suggesting a new way to think about cross-cultural research that should be of interest to macro-organizational scholars.

Tightness–Looseness and Organizational Outcomes

Tightness–looseness has a number of effects on organizations, which are quasi-isomorphic with the individual-level outcomes discussed previously. On the basis of the previous discussion of organizational culture, culture strength, and alignment among HR practices, it follows that organizations in tight societal cultures generally have greater order, precision, cohesion, and efficiency and are more stable, less flexible, and more resistant to change (cf. Ostroff & Bowen, 2000; Schneider et al., 2002; Sorenson, 2002). Also, because of high accountability, alignment, and sanctioning, employees are more likely to conform and less likely to engage in deviant behavior. Furthermore, although extensive recruitment, selection, and socialization processes increase organizational predictability and control, these practices may hinder organizations in tight cultures in their ability to quickly adapt to changing conditions.[3]

By contrast, organizations in loose societies generally have less order and cohesion, yet greater innovation and more tolerance for organizational change. In organizations where there is less accountability and sanctioning, employees have much more discretion and a wider range of acceptable behavior. This enables higher levels of organizational creativity and innovation, as a diversity of expressed ideas and behaviors is generally associated with greater innovativeness (Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991). Less rigidly shared perceptions and loosely coupled organizational practices in loose

societies also foster a wider repertoire of behavioral scripts among employees, further facilitating flexibility and openness to change (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995; Wright & Snell, 1998). However, although creativity and change are fostered in organizations in loose societies, these same processes may result in less predictability and order and a greater degree of deviant behavior.

> *Proposition 7.* Societal tightness–looseness has cross-level effects on organizational outcomes as mediated by organizational culture and culture strength. Organizations in tight societies tend to have greater order, precision, cohesion, stability, and resistance to change. Organizations in loose societies tend to have less order and cohesion, and more deviance, innovation, and tolerance for organizational change.

Proposition 7 highlights the importance of understanding how organizational-level outcomes are indirectly affected by the societal context. Scholars are increasingly interested in the individual and organizational-level factors that predict organizational innovation and change. Yet with few exceptions (e.g., Elenkov & Manev, 2005; Herbig & Dunphy, 1998; Jones & Davis, 2000; Shane, 1992), research on societal predictors of these outcomes is still in its infancy. Anderson, De Drue, and Nijstad (2004) noted that there is a "pointed gap in our understanding of innovation processes across different cultural contexts, and one that we raise as an important pathway for future research" (p. 160). Proposition 7 has the potential to explain additional variance in these organizational outcomes by advancing that societal-level tightness–looseness, through its cross-level influences on organizational culture and culture strength, influences organizational innovation and change. This proposition can be tested with multilevel modeling techniques that link measures of societal tightness–looseness with measures of organizational innovation rates, such as the number of new products, patents, and services (see Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Burpitt & Bigoness, 1997). To examine the notion that tight societies have higher precision and control, quality measures, such as the number of defect-free products and the amount of time wasted on repairing rejected products (Naveh & Erez, 2004), could be examined across cultures.

Research can also examine whether organizations in loose societies have more radical innovations, whereas organizations in loose societies have more incremental innovations. Organizations in tight and loose societies might vary in how they allocate research and development funds (e.g., to doing basic research aimed at new, radical innovations versus to improving existing process or product technology). At the same time, although innovations may be developed with greater speed and frequency in loose societies, implementation rates (e.g., time-to-market mea-

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[3] Future research may also explore the notion that organizations in tight societies can be innovative when their employees are made accountable for innovative performance. For example, in Japan, a continuous learning culture helps to afford innovation in the context of rules and bureaucracy in many organizations (Morishima, 1995). Likewise, the government in Singapore has also begun to intervene to foster more innovation within Singaporean organizations. For example, in 1997 the prime minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong, called for more creativity within schools at the 7th International Conference on Thinking. In this respect, when innovation or change becomes a strategic goal, it may be even easier to implement in tight societies given that strong norms and enhanced coordination among individuals can facilitate faster implementation.

sures) might be faster in tight societies (S. M. Katz, Casey, & Aiman-Smith, 2005; Wong, 2002). More generally, this proposition illustrates the value of examining how organizational outcomes are influenced by societal-level culture as mediated by differences in organizational culture.

Tightness–Looseness and the Importance of Fit Across Multiple Levels of Analysis

In this final section, we discuss the dynamics of fit and lack of fit in tight and loose societies at multiple levels of analysis. Our primary proposition is that because there is more constraint and monitoring in tight societies, parties (i.e., individuals, groups, organizations) are much more concerned about fitting in with others, and thus, a lack of fit between parties has more negative consequences in tight than in loose societies. We discuss cross-cultural differences in fit at three levels of analysis: (a) fit of organizational practices to the societal context, (b) fit of organizations to other organizations, and (c) fit of individuals to organizations.

Fit of organizational practices to the societal context. Societal tightness–looseness is proposed to moderate the impact of organizational practices on organizational outcomes. Organizational practices that are congruent with the degree of tightness–looseness in the societal context are more likely to be successful in organizations than organizational practices that are not congruent with the societal context. For example, practices that entail a high degree of accountability, monitoring, and control (such as those found in high-reliability, quality-focused manufacturing processes, including total quality management and the International Organization for Standardization's 9000 program) are expected to be more successful in tight as compared with loose societies. This is consistent with research that shows that American companies have high failure rates (approximately 70%) when implementing the regimented monitoring systems associated with ISO 9000 (Souza-Poza, Nystrom, & Wiebe, 2000; Withers & Ebrahimpour, 1996). By contrast, consistent with our proposition, Japanese and Singaporean organizations have a much higher level of success in implementing total quality management programs (Dahlgaard, Kristensen, Kanji, Juhl, & Sohal, 1998; Sohal, 1998).

Our earlier discussion helps to elucidate why total quality management practices are likely to be met with more success in tight than loose societies. A high degree of accountability and monitoring is more natural in tight societies, and individuals have psychological attributes (e.g., high normative associative strength, regulatory strength, prevention focus) that are attuned to and supportive of such practices. By contrast, a high degree of control and monitoring in loose societies likely elicits negative reactions among employees (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). This is consistent with Lerner and Tetlock's (1999) notion that high degrees of accountability and external controls are often met with resistance, and we argue that this is particularly acute in loose societies. Field studies in the United States of organizational accountability have also shown that monitoring often disrupts performance because of negative emotional reactions (Sutton & Galunic, 1996). Workers complain about the loss of control in the way that they perform their jobs (Aiello & Kolb, 1995), even to the point of seeing monitoring as a form of oppression (Martin & Freeman, 2003).

By contrast, we expect organizations in loose societies to have greater success with implementing organizational practices aimed at creativity and innovation because of their fit with the psychological characteristics that are cultivated (e.g., promotion focus, innovator styles) and because of their fit with the high degree of latitude in societal context. Encouraging organizational innovation may be met with resistance in tight societies, where compliance with established norms for work is commonplace, and psychological characteristics encourage individuals to maintain existing structures rather than to break with established traditions.

> *Proposition 8.* The relationship between organizational practices and organizational outcomes is moderated by societal tightness–looseness. Practices that entail a high degree of accountability, monitoring, and control (e.g., total quality management) are more successful in organizations in tight societies, whereas practices that entail a high degree of creativity and innovation are more successful in organizations in loose societies.

Institutional pressures and between-organization fit. We propose that societal tightness–looseness moderates the degree of similarity that exists across organizations. This notion is based within institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), which suggests that organizations are pressured to conform to external standards to gain legitimacy and tend to become similar (i.e., isomorphic). Isomorphism may occur either because organizations feel *coercive pressure* from the society to conform to what other organizations are doing, *mimetic pressure* to imitate what other organizations are doing when faced with ambiguity, or *normative pressure* to select and promote professionals who are similar to each other (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Regardless of the form of pressure, institutional theory posits that organizations increasingly come to reflect the same rules that have been institutionalized and legitimated in the nation state (Hamilton & Biggart, 1988; Jepperson & Meyer, 1991).

Extending this theory across cultures, we propose that there are stronger isomorphic pressures (i.e., coercive, mimetic, normative) for organizations in tight societies, given the importance of abiding by norms and avoiding being deviant. As such, we anticipate a narrower range of organizational forms in tight than loose societies. There is some indirect evidence for this proposition. Orru, Biggart, and Hamilton (1991) discussed the elaborate systems of control that are in place in Japan and Korea, which constrain organizational forms and enhance homogenization across organizations. In Japan, six coalitions of highly successful organizations (intermarket firms, or *kigyo shudan*) are virtually indistinguishable in their organization. For example, they each have a similar lineup of competing companies across sectors, their own financial institutions, and a president's club made up of leading companies' presidents who meet once a month. The leading enterprise groups in Korea, or *chaebol,* are also similar, with organizations predominantly controlled by a single family and organized through a central holding company. Systems of control are also enforced by state regulations. As Hamilton and Biggart (1988) explained, "a firm that does not respond as expected to particular incentives may find that its tax returns are subject to careful examination, or that its application for bank credit is studiously ignored" (p. S77). By contrast, in loose societies, where there are fewer societal controls and less concern with fitting in, there should be less homogeneity across organizations.

Proposition 9. Societal tightness–looseness influences the degree of between-organization fit in organizational practices, such that organizations in tight societies are subjected to greater isomorphic pressures than are organizations in loose societies.

Tightness and the negative consequence of misfit for individuals. Last, at a microlevel of analysis, we theorize that a lack of fit between individuals and groups/organizations has more negative consequences in tight than in loose societies. Lincoln, Hanada, and Olson (1981) demonstrated that Japanese experienced more satisfaction and social integration when they fit the organizational context, yet satisfaction and social integration among Americans were less affected by their fit with the organizational context. Similarly, Wiersema and Bird (1993) found that top management team heterogeneity was even more strongly predictive of team turnover in Japan, as compared with previously conducted research in the United States. They argued that these results reflect the heightened sensitivity to differences in Japan, which is consistent with our theory of tightness–looseness.

The deleterious consequences of a lack of fit are particularly detrimental for individuals in tight societies because of the negative interpersonal dynamics that transpire when individuals deviate from others. Research on bullying in organizations has shown that people who are deemed deviant by their coworkers may become targets of frequent personal attacks or isolation (Leymann, 1996; Namie & Namie, 2000). While bullying processes exist in numerous nations, they may be particularly acute in tight cultures. It has long been recognized that Japanese children who are different from others experience *ijime*, or bullying aimed at enforcing conformity to social norms (Kidder, 1992; Rios-Ellis, Bellamy, & Shoji, 2000; Takemura & Takagi, 1988). In a *Los Angeles Times* report, Magnier (1999) noted that, "While bullying has long been evident in Japanese schools and companies as a form of social control, workplace experts say its use has never been so widespread or so pointedly focused on getting large numbers of people to quit" (p. A1). We suggest that although such processes occur in loose societies, they are more acute in tight societies where deviance is less tolerated.

Proposition 10. A lack of fit between individuals and groups/organizations produces more negative consequences for individuals in tight as compared with loose societies.

In his analysis of the organizational fit literature, Schneider (2001) remarked that "national culture must enter the equation for person–environment fit research. It must but it has not" (p. 148). Propositions 8–10 heed this call and suggest research directions on how societal culture influences fit across levels of analysis. Proposition 8 suggests that the implementation of certain organizational practices (e.g., quality control versus innovation) is differentially successful depending on the societal context. Although it is known that failure rates for quality-control procedures (e.g., the International Organization for Standardization's 9000 program) vary across societies (Souza-Poza et al., 2000; Withers & Ebrahimpour, 1996), there has yet to be a coherent explanation for this finding. Our linkage of this phenomenon to societal tightness–looseness can be examined through field experiments that directly assess the effectiveness of newly implemented quality-control procedures (e.g., Naveh & Erez, 2004) in tight and loose societies. Likewise, laboratory experiments could also be designed to examine how quality versus innovation-focused practices are linked to team performance in tight and loose societies.

Proposition 9 points to the importance of societal tightness–looseness to another form of fit: between-organization fit. Although there is much research on institutional pressures, there has been little attention to how societal culture affects institutional pressures. Proposition 9 can be examined through multilevel modeling techniques that link societal tightness–looseness with between-organizational variability in organizational flexibility versus control.

Last, Proposition 10 points to the importance of examining the relationship between societal culture and fit at the individual level. The notion that individuals in tight societies are acutely affected by a lack of fit can be tested with multilevel modeling techniques wherein societal tightness–looseness moderates the relationship between person–organization fit and/or person–team fit and satisfaction, stress, and turnover intentions (e.g., O'Reilly et al., 1991). Alternatively, policy-capturing designs (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Jansen, & Colbert, 2002) or perceptual measures of fit (Ostroff, Shin, & Kinicki, 2005) can be used to assess the notion that person–organization fit is a stronger determinant of individuals' outcomes in tight societies. Proposition 10 also suggests that the impact of diversity in teams would benefit from a tightness–looseness perspective. We know that diversity can have a negative impact on group processes and performance (Milliken & Martins, 1996), and this may be exacerbated in tight cultures, where individuals may leave teams to which they are dissimilar at much higher rates. Similarly, this proposition may ultimately be useful for understanding variation in expatriate return rates. We would speculate that expatriates going from loose to tight cultures would experience more difficulty in becoming integrated with host nationals, as compared with expatriates going from tight to loose cultures. Research can examine whether interaction, work, general adjustment, and ultimately premature return rates (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989) are lower when expatriates go from tight to loose societies versus from loose to tight societies.

Discussion

In this article, we advanced a multilevel theory and research agenda on tightness–looseness, an aspect of culture that has received little theoretical and empirical attention. By applying this construct to modern societies, we revitalize an important age-old construct and show its promise for cross-cultural research.

Our theory provides a roadmap for research on tightness–looseness that spans multiple levels of analysis. Following recommendations, we advanced top-down, bottom-up, and cross-level propositions, linking societal tightness–looseness with individual and organizational-level phenomena. Through our propositions, we illustrated how societal tightness–looseness both affects and is, in turn, further reinforced by lower level forces. For example, Propositions 2A–2C illustrate that external norms and constraints affect internal psychological states (i.e., a psychology of felt accountability), which in turn reinforce and sustain external norms and constraints. Propositions 4A–4C and Propositions 5A and 5B illustrate how organizational culture and culture strength are influenced by top-down effects of societal tightness–looseness and are further reinforced through bottom-up processes based on psychological felt accountability. The theory also illustrates how

societal tightness–looseness has a ripple effect on variance across multiple levels. Strong norms and sanctions in tight as compared with loose societies reduce variability across individuals' psychological attributes and behaviors, result in stronger alignment and strength of organizational cultures, and create institutional forces that constrain variability across organizations. Our theoretical analysis also has important methodological implications. Scholars need to note that a lack of aggregation with traditional techniques (e.g., r_{wg}, ICCs) in cross-cultural research could in fact have important substantive interpretations. Finally, many topics we discussed—from the psychology of accountability at the individual level, to organizational culture strength, alignment, and innovation at the organizational level, to the dynamics of fit within and across organizations in different societies—have received little cross-cultural attention, and thus, the theory has the potential to explain additional variance across societies that has been heretofore overlooked.

This article clearly highlights the need to develop measures of tightness and looseness for cross-cultural research in modern societies. There are numerous measures of cultural values and beliefs, reflecting their theoretical and empirical dominance in the field, and in comparison, there is a dearth of measures of cultural norms. Consistent with other culture-level research (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1994), it is important that researchers develop and validate scales that assess the strength of norms and sanctions across cultures.[4] Tightness–looseness can also be assessed through measures derived from Jackson's (1966) return potential model. For example, although it has yet to be applied to the societal level, Jackson's measure of the range of tolerable behavior is directly linked to our notion of the latitude of social norms. Measures of situational constraint (Price & Bouffard, 1974), which examine how appropriate a wide range of behaviors are across a wide range of situations, can also be used in studies of tightness–looseness (Gelfand et al., 2006). Qualitative research, which examines public symbols, including popular heroes, proverbs, literature, music, art, and fashion, can also be used to examine variations in societal tightness–looseness. For example, popular books, heroes, and proverbs are likely to reflect an emphasis on abiding by norms in tight societies versus tolerance for deviance in loose societies (e.g., in the United States, the book *First, Break all the Rules* by Buckingham & Cuffman, 1999).

For reasons of space, we did not discuss ecological and historical correlates of societal tightness–looseness, yet this is an important area for future research. Pelto (1968), Triandis (1989), and Chan et al. (1996) speculated that population density and isolation are correlates of societal tightness–looseness, and Gelfand (1999) proposed that a history of conflict between nations may also result in stronger norms and sanctions in nations in order to deal with external threat. Likewise, we did not discuss societal-level outcomes, but there is reason to believe that tight and loose societies are differentiated in their degree of societal order and cohesion versus social disorganization, rates of innovation versus stability, and degree of conformity and deviance, in parallel to other levels of analysis. Indeed, sociological theorists have argued that weak normative systems result in numerous forms of delinquency, including bending the rules and various forms of retreatism (e.g., alcoholism; Durkheim, 1893/1964; Merton, 1968). This is consistent with Baumeister and Heatherton's (1996) analysis of American culture, which they argued has numerous societal deviance problems (e.g., teenage pregnancy, drugs and alcohol abuse, assaults) that arise from a general climate of permissiveness and a lack of discipline and social control. We would extend this analysis by arguing that such societal phenomena are associated with societal tightness–looseness.

Practical Implications

Although our primary purpose was to advance a theory of societal tightness–looseness, the model suggests a number of potential areas where cross-cultural conflicts can arise across the tight–loose divide, with implications for international and global organizations and their employees. For example, Propositions 4A–4C suggest that organizations forming mergers across tight and loose societies might need to negotiate conflicts involving differences in organizational practices, culture strength, and alignment. Proposition 9 suggests that organizations that are expanding their operations across cultural boundaries may experience a heightened number of institutional pressures if going from loose to tight societies (or a dampened number of pressures if going from tight to loose societies). Global organizations, as we have argued in Proposition 4B, are likely to have different preferences on standardization versus localization depending on the tightness–looseness of the societal context. At an individual level, Proposition 10 suggests that individuals are likely to experience much stress, especially when going from loose to tight societies. We also note, however, that individuals going from tight to loose societies will likely experience different sources of stress, most notably a sense of normlessness, deviance, and ambiguity regarding behavioral expectations, which may conflict with their societally cultivated felt accountability. Proposition 2A illustrates the importance of understanding differences in societal institutions for individuals crossing tight and loose societies. The highly publicized incident of caning in Singapore (Shenon, 1994) is a case in point. Individuals traveling to tight and loose societies may face different sanctions for similar crimes and encounter differences in the media, schools, and so forth. Finally, Propositions 2C, 3B, and 4C also illustrate that individuals crossing between tight and loose societal cultures are likely to experience disparate levels of variance than they are accustomed to in their home countries. In all, our theory suggests that training should also focus on the strength of norms and sanctioning (or lack thereof) that individuals face when crossing cultures, and not just on cultural values.

Although we discussed generalized societal tightness–looseness in this article, we emphasize that there are domains, regions, or ethnic variations in tightness–looseness *within all societies* as well. For example, although the United States is expected to be generally loose, there are also domains of life, ethnic groups, and regions that are relatively tighter. We would speculate, for example, that domains of life that are highly important in any society are more likely to be tight. Thus, like other cultural dimensions, there are contexts in all societies that likely promote tightness and contexts that promote looseness. The basic psychological, social, and organizational processes discussed throughout this article,

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[4] We are currently validating such a survey measure across 35 nations for future use in studies of tightness–looseness. A copy of this measure can be obtained from Michele J. Gelfand.

however, should be useful to understanding such variation. Like-wise, our focus throughout this article has been on traditional work organizations, yet a tightness–looseness perspective is as applicable to informal organizations. For example, an understanding of tightness–looseness may help to understand such diverse groups as the Taliban, the military, and perhaps inner city gangs—in terms of the organizational practices and psychological attributes that make them up. Finally, although tightness–looseness was discussed as if it is a static phenomena, as with other components of culture, clearly it can change over time, either through bottom-up or top-down changes, or through catastrophic changes that have a major impact on multiple levels.

Concluding Remarks

In a critique of the exclusive use of values as the basis for cultural comparisons, Bond (1997) cogently remarked,

> To date, the values construct has been our major support. Many of us have embraced it enthusiastically. Its face validity as a psychological construct combined with Hofstede's mapping of cultural values gave us confidence in foreign territory. Our enthusiasm frequently out-stripped our caution, however.... Many fundamental canons of cross-cultural procedure were ignored; many cautionary studies within mainstream psychology were ignored; alternative psychological constructs of possible use were ignored. (pp. 270–271)

Despite such calls to expand our conceptual toolkit (Bond, 1997), cross-cultural research has nevertheless been dominated by the values paradigm. Culture is a complex phenomenon, necessitating multilevel and multidisciplinary perspectives to adequately capture its breadth and depth, and an exclusive focus on cultural values is insufficient to capture this complexity. The multilevel theory of cultural tightness–looseness presented in this article begins to broaden our view of cultural differences.

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Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board has opened nominations for the editorships of **Journal of Applied Psychology, Psychological Bulletin, Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes (IRGP),** and **Journal of Educational Psychology** for the years 2009-2014. Sheldon Zedeck, PhD, Harris Cooper, PhD, Howard J. Shaffer, PhD, Charles S. Carver, PhD, and Karen R. Harris, PhD, respectively, are the incumbent editors.

Candidates should be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 2008 to prepare for issues published in 2009. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

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- **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: IRGP,** David C. Funder, PhD
- **Journal of Educational Psychology,** Peter A. Ornstein, PhD and Leah L. Light, PhD

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